

## Local security-making in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: the production of securityscapes by everyday practices

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# Local Security-Making in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

The production of securityscapes by everyday practices

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In cooperation with researchers in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion) is conducting a three-year research project on everyday security practices in Central Asia, which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. The project was launched in July 2015. While security has become an important focus of academic work on and in Central Asia, most studies highlight the geo-strategic importance of the region and underline the threats to states posed by non-state armed groups and transnational criminal organizations. The research project proposes a radically different approach to studying security in Central Asia. As a point of departure, it understands security as an everyday practice of people that consists in identifying and engaging perceptions of existential threat. It asks: How do various groups of people deal with security issues in their daily lives? For the purpose of addressing this question, it develops and applies the innovative concept of securityscapes, which is partly inspired by the work of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai as well as recent debates in sociology and political science on studying security as a constitutive practice and in a less state-centric manner.

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## Main Findings

### **BICC's research project addresses a blind spot in the study of security in Central Asia**

Security-related research on Central Asia remains limited. Often, it assumes a regional perspective, asking how inter-state cooperation might be deepened in order to counter various security challenges. While some publications emphasize non-conventional threats, states are the primary referent-objects of security. A few studies have shifted the focus to 'human security'. However, just as state-centric approaches, they still approach security as an objective and desirable condition of existence. Security practices, by comparison, have only been researched with reference to 'securitization' theory and elite discourses. The question is how either states or international organizations frame various security issues to legitimize exceptional actions. These approaches are certainly illuminating. Yet, they have little to say on the ways in which people practice security on a day-to-day basis. In turn, security has so far not been of explicit concern to ethnographic research on everyday life in Central Asia. Our research project addresses this blind-spot..

### **With 'securityscapes', we introduce an innovative analytical framework for studying security.**

We understand security as an everyday practice of people that consists in identifying and engaging perceptions of existential threat. How do various groups of people deal with security issues in their daily lives? For the purpose of addressing this question, we develop and apply the concept of *securityscapes*, which is partly inspired by the work of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai as well as recent debates in sociology and political science on studying security as a practice and in a less state-centric manner. Securityscapes can be understood as 'imagined worlds' of security and insecurity that goad and structure the lives of people as they go about their daily business. It draws attention to the ways in which people organize their lives around perceived relations of existential endangerment.

### **We explore the securityscapes of various social groups in urban spaces of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.**

Field research in spaces of limited state capacity has demonstrated that local security practices regulate the everyday lives of people even in the absence of a state monopoly of force. Securityscapes emerge and reproduce themselves quite independently from security-related imaginations and practices prescribed by the state. We hypothesize that this observation also applies to people living in areas characterized by a high visibility of public security forces. For this reason, we explore securityscapes in urban spaces of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. What is more, our hypothesis is likely to be particularly relevant with regard to social groups that identify themselves—and are identified by others—as distinct from what official discourse claims to be the 'norm', be it on ethnic or cultural grounds or in terms of sexual orientation. Our research project will investigate, for example, the securityscapes of the Pamiri people in Khorugh in south-eastern Tajikistan, of the Uzbek minority in the Kyrgyz city of Osh, of the 'Luli' or 'gypsy' people on the outskirts of the town, and of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek.

## Conceptual Framework

Security has become an important focus of academic work on and in Central Asia. However, most studies highlight the geo-strategic importance of the region and underline the threats to states posed by non-state armed groups and transnational criminal organizations. Our research project takes a radically different approach to studying security in Central Asia. It asks: How do people deal with security issues in their daily lives? To address this question, we develop and apply the innovative concept of securityscapes. The first part of this Working Paper outlines this analytical framework, which is partly inspired by Arjun Appadurai's notion of 'scapes' as well as recent debates in sociology and political science on studying security as a constitutive practice and in a less state-centric manner. The second part gives a brief and tentative overview of our ongoing work, in particular the field research sites where we explore the respective securityscapes of various groups of people in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

### Appadurai's 'scapes'

In his influential article "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1996), the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai popularizes the analytical lens of 'scapes'. Certain global dynamics, he argues, have engendered the emergence of social collectives whose identities no longer rely on the bounded, territorial construct of the nation-state (see p. 13, 15). Appadurai considers the state to be "on its last legs" (p. 19) and in a "terminal crisis" (p. 21). In its stead, he envisions the advent of "more dispersed and diverse forms of transnational allegiance and affiliation" (p. 20) that bear the hallmarks of an emerging "post-national political world" (p. 22).

To chart this development, the "imagination" is a key concept for Appadurai. He understands it as the "constructed landscape of collective aspirations" (p. 31). Moreover, as a shared mental map of one's own self and one's place in the world, it expresses itself within "an organized field of social practices" (p. 31). It is thus that the imagination needs to be taken into account as "a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (p. 30). In and through the everyday practices generated by shared imaginations, collectives come to

know and think of themselves as communities. Appadurai's argument is very much inspired by Benedict Anderson's historical work on the construction of the "nation-state" as an "imagined community" (1996). His original contribution lies in suggesting that such practiced imaginations now increasingly escape and transcend "modern" territorial confines. Today, we witness the advent of a "plurality" of imagined communities—or "imagined worlds", as Appadurai prefers to call them (1996, p. 5, also p. 33)—that "frequently operate beyond the boundaries of the nation" (p. 8, also pp. 53–54).

Appadurai refers to the distinctive "building blocks" (p. 33) of this "complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes" (p. 31) as "scapes". These are "deeply perspectival constructs", subjective interpretations of the world that—although individually internalized—become shared across "larger formations" and thus provide agents with a map to "navigate" through social spheres that defy or even "contest" and "subvert" the imagined community of the state (p. 33). All in all, Appadurai proposes five such "fluid" and "irregular" scapes that he considers to be most relevant for understanding contemporary transformations of social life (p. 33): "ethnoscapes" ("the landscapes of group identity", p. 48), "technoscapes" (the "global configuration [...] of technology", p. 34), "financescapes" (the "disposition of global capital", p. 34), "mediascapes" (the "distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information", p. 35) and "ideoscapes" (the "ideologies of states" and the "counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it", p. 36).

As Appadurai goes on to argue, "current global flows" proceed "in and through the growing disjunctures" between these five scapes (p. 37). Given his principal concern with the supposed demise of the state and emerging post-national constellations, these "disjunctures" seem to be most apparent and severe in the ways that "ideoscapes" diverge from the other scapes. 'Ethnoscapes', for instance, are no longer necessarily congruent with the territorial space of the nation. And unbounded "financescapes" undermine our trust in the ability of governments to effectively control and contain global capital flows (see p. 40).

## Security beyond the state

While Appadurai has little to say on security, a number of security-related studies in sociology and political science share some of his central analytical perspectives and claims. For example, many scholars question the centrality of states to security practices. Inspired not least by empirical observations, especially the growing importance of private security companies around the world, they stress the increasing diversification of security providers. Similar to Appadurai's argument, the criminologists Clifford Shearing and Les Johnston assert that "the state's traditional role as exclusive guarantor of security has been superseded by new public-private or, better, state-non-state networks" (2003, p. 32). Contemporary security practices need to be understood as "nodal"; that is, as realized through complex systems of interaction between various different agents (see also Burris et al., 2005, p. 33).

In political science, this approach influenced the model of "security assemblages", introduced by Rita Abrahamsen and Michael Williams (2011). They, too, claim that "the state's much-vaunted monopoly of legitimate force is increasingly enmeshed in networks and relations that cannot be contained within the boundaries of the national state" (p. 217). Abrahamsen and Williams understand security assemblages as "transnational structures and networks, [wherein] a range of different actors and normativities interact, cooperate and compete to produce new institutions, practices and forms of deterritorialized security governance" (p. 90). The reference to assemblages, here, is intended to capture "the new geographies of power that are simultaneously global and national, public and private: Complex hybrid structures that inhabit national settings but are stretched across national boundaries in terms of actors, knowledges, technologies, norms and values" (p. 95). Had Appadurai been asked to define a securityscape himself, he would have conceivably described it in precisely this manner.

But what is security anyway? Or rather: How should security be studied? More critically inclined scholars have proposed to study security not as a desirable and objective condition of existence, but as a social practice. For so-called securitization theory,

this doing consists in "speech acts" that present an issue "as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure" (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23-24). From another viewpoint, security appears as the practiced imaginary of differentiating between inside and outside, us and them (see Klein 1994, pp 6-7). So-called poststructuralist theorists argue that the idea of such a thing as a sovereign state can only be meaningfully evoked by virtue of such distinctions (see Walker, 1992). In the words of David Campbell, the "constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is [...] not a threat to a state's identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility" (1998, p. 13). If, as Appadurai had it, the imagination is the "constitutive feature of modern subjectivity", it would be most prevalently manifest in the practice of security. Yet, both securitization and poststructuralist International Relations (IR) theory remain primarily concerned with the doings of states and elite-discourses. If we acknowledge that a multiplicity of actors other than states practice security, the contours of a new research agenda begin to appear.

## Securitiscaes

The concept of securitiscaes that we propose here departs from key insights of both Appadurai and recent debates in security-related research. However, it also digresses from some of their claims. The security practices of people do not have to be necessarily more 'de-territorialized' than those of states. Regardless of who practices security, we argue that it always involves the drawing of borders and boundaries. What is more, security is not only—or even necessarily—about states of exception. To practice security can be a perfectly ordinary and mundane activity. In brief, we understand securitiscaes as a highly diverse and heterogeneous spectrum of shared imaginations and everyday practices that all people necessarily partake in when responding to the existential contingencies of life. In doing so, they constitute various semblances of order and subjectivity upon a striation of social and physical space.



In order to avoid any initial confusion or possible misunderstandings, it should be noted that the term *securityscapes* has already been employed in academic writing, albeit only rarely. Hugh Gusterson defines *securityscapes* as “asymmetrical distributions of weaponry, military force, and military-scientific resources among nation-states and the local and global imaginaries of identity, power and vulnerability that accompany these distributions” (2004, p. xxi). With its focus on the military and relations between nation-states, this understanding remains very much in line with the axioms of traditional IR, however. Tyler Wall’s 2011 article on the Politics of drones also makes reference to “liminal security-scapes.” For him, they denote certain geographies where “the practices of everyday life are unstable and insecure and where bodies are subjected to routine surveillance and violence” (2011, p. 240). Given the focus on everyday life, this understanding is certainly closer to the concept of *securityscapes* proposed here. However, *securityscapes* are not exhaustively described with reference to instability, disorder and top-down violence. Quite the contrary: We suggest that they emphasize the agency of people in constructing their very own—and quite possibly non-violent—sense of order.

At the most basic level, *securityscapes* encompass all those imaginations and practices through which we seek to come to terms with a profoundly insecure, chaotic and contingent world that incessantly creates the desire for some sort of secure existence therein. As many social theorists point out, the practice of security is, first and foremost, an epistemological undertaking for reducing social complexity (see Kaufmann, 1970, p. xii; Luhmann 1990, p. 134). For Michel Foucault, for example, the essential function of security is “to respond to a reality in such a way that this response cancels out the reality to which it responds—nullifies it, or limits, checks, or regulates it” (2007, p. 69). It is thus that *securityscapes* have quite a bit in common with the concept of “*riskscapes*” (see Müller-Mahn and Everts, 2013). Risk, here, has been defined as “a strategy for transforming unmanageable contingency into manageable complexity” (Korf, 2013, p. 69). Such *riskscapes* would refer to an extremely broad range of activities. For the purpose of analytical clarity, we argue

that *securityscapes* include only those imaginations and practices that posit contingencies as existentially dangerous. *Securityscapes* respond to perceived threats that call the very existence of a valued object into question. “Unmanageable contingency” is therefore not only transformed into “manageable complexity” but into existentially threatening otherness (see Dillon 1990, p. 115). Ultimately, this dangerous other is, of course, death (see Huysmans, 1998). The valued object would therefore need to be construed as a form of life. *Securityscapes* are all about working for the continuation of life against the threat of finitude.

Imaginations and practices for securitizing life against death can be observed anywhere in the everyday practices of all people. *Securityscapes* become manifest in the “routinized ways in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250). It is not just a matter of speech acts. *Securityscapes* draw equal attention to the ways in which we interact with material objects. They refer to the “nexus of doings and sayings” (Schatzki, 2002, p. 87). Simple examples include the fastening of seatbelts, locking the front door when going out, avoidance of high-risk areas, or sportive activities to stay healthy and fit. Moreover, not all security practices need to be necessarily manifest in intentional behaviour. They may also appear in more or less unconscious “habits, customs, traditions and values” (Burris et al., 2005, p. 36)—what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus* as a “set of acquired characteristics” of “being, acting, seeing and thinking” (2005, p. 45, p. 43). Some security practices may thus not even be directly associated with security at all but rather considered as “tenets of religion or mere facts of life” (Burris et al., 2005, p. 36). Yet, they will always be coordinated and systematic, not *ad hoc* responses. For instance, an act of suddenly jumping to the side in order to avoid being hit by a car would not necessarily suggest anything noteworthy. Yet, if people travel along roads in a certain, routinized manner so as to minimize the risks of accidents (or assaults), we could clearly assume the presence of a *securityscape*.

With *securityscapes* permeating the very fabric of social life, they become an important element in the constitution of subjectivity and order. To partake

in them entails the “immersion in an extensive tissue of coexistence” that converts shared imaginations into the construction of visible and concrete reality (Schatzki, 2002, p. 87). As Anthony Giddens has it, practices “are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through these activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible” (1984, p. 2).

It is thus that the concept of securitiscaes differs from many previous approaches to the study of security. For a start, it turns the table on securitization theory: Securiscaes are neither distinct from normal expressions of social behaviour, nor do they engender a politics of exception. Quite the contrary, it is in and through securiscaes that any kind of normality and order is produced and reproduced at all. What is more, from this perspective security is not something that is practiced by professionals or experts alone (see Müller-Mahn and Everts, 2013, p. 28). It is not even necessarily imposed from above by some authoritative, sovereign will, whereby people become secured whether they want to or not. Securiscaes do not deny or ignore the existence such compulsory security practices. The idea of authoritative law may, in fact, be very much engrained in the shared imaginations and everyday practices of people, thus rendering it all the more effective and powerful (an effect that criminologists have called “responsibilization”, see Garland, 2001, pp. 124-125). Importantly, however, when studying securiscaes, the starting point is always what people actually do in their daily lives—not what authorities say they ought to do. Security needs to be explored in distinctive “micro-spaces” (Hirst, 2005), at the “extremities of power” (Foucault, 2003, p. 27). The analytical framework of securiscaes directly picks up on Foucault’s proposal to “cut off the King’s head” (1980, p. 121) and to analyze power “outside the model of Leviathan, outside the field delineated by [...] the [...] State” (2003, p. 34). It is therefore able to detect the miniscule tactics of everyday life that may well resist being reduced to succumbing to hegemonic operations of power. Following the theory of Michel de Certeau, securiscaes can “bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift

creativity of groups or individuals” (1988, pp. xiv-xv). For people often conform to the mechanisms of power “only in order to evade them, appropriate and then reappropriate them for the purpose of actively applying them in creative and innovative ways, thus subverting the dominant order of things” (p. xiv).

Securiscaes run as much through urban environments with a high density of police officers as they do through rural communities and so-called spaces of limited state capacity. The absence of centralized force does not coincide with an absence of securiscaes. Securiscaes are everywhere: They exist wherever and whenever people come together and interact with each other. That is not to argue, alongside Appadurai and many others, that the days of the state are numbered. There is no necessary rupture between securiscaes and ideoscaes. We agree with Josiah Heymann’s and Howard Campbell’s argument that Appadurai’s notion of some grand, epochal shift “obscures and simplifies the past” (2009, p. 136). It gives states “too much power and depth and history” (p. 140) and tends to overlook the ways in which security has always been practiced in assemblages of people, quite irrespective of the state. Thus, while some agents navigating securiscaes may well claim to act in the name of some government, this does not privilege them a priori in our analysis. The relative importance of, say, a police officer within any collectively shared and practiced imagination of security in a particular place is something that would need to be empirically established rather than assumed from the outset.

To move analysis from states to the everyday practices of people does not automatically imply some de-territorializing trajectory. We digress from those accounts that follow Appadurai when associating scaes with a necessary deconstruction of borders and boundaries. Indeed, whereas Müller-Mahn and Everts, for instance, still relate riskscaes to the “deterritorialized and border-crosscutting movements of people, things and ideas” (2013, pp. 24-25), we emphasize the (re)territorializing dynamic of securiscaes. The boundaries set up by securiscaes may be intangible, moral commandments. They may just as well be physical and material borders: striated spaces,

carved up by barbed wire, walls, enclosures, checkpoints, garrisons and no-go areas. This is not to say that securityscapes prevent and block all flows and movements. Foucault, in fact, argues that security is not so much geared toward “fixing and demarcating” borders as rather about promoting “circulations”: to ensure that “things are always in movement, constantly moving around, continually going from one point to another.” As he goes on to point out, however, security practices seek to contain and regulate flows “in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are cancelled out” (2007, p. 93). Hence, the territorialities of securityscapes are, above all, spaces of “channels” and “pipes” for directing movements along certain paths (Deleuzes and Guattari, 2005, p. 363; see also Bigo 2006). To study a securityscape within a certain locality is, then, not least to follow the passages of people across a territorialized and striated space, itself designed to secure forms of life against the threat of death and constituting social order in the process.

Nevertheless, the concept of securityscapes is able to detect and highlight the diversity and heterogeneity of security imaginations and practices, which—with Schatzki—ought to be considered as “temporally and spatially dispersed” (1996, p. 89). Although ultimately always a matter of life and death, we can expect securityscapes to significantly differ with regard to the precise contingencies they identify as being the most threatening (i.e. earthquakes, diseases, smokers, migrants, criminals, terrorists, etc.). What might appear as valuable and endangered to some might not necessarily appear so for others. For example, people may have diverse ideas which areas are thought to be safe and unsafe. Such variations will probably be linked to differences in social status and belonging (gender, ethnicity, occupation, etc.). Even within the very same locale, say: a particular city district or village community, we will almost certainly encounter a wide variety of securityscapes. Müller-Mahn and Everts also stress that different scapes “can relate to the same objective spatial expanse of the world” (2013, p. 26; see also Schatzki, 2010, p. 10). Moreover, and depending on other shared identities, any one person will probably ascribe to several securityscapes.

Importantly, the meaning and value of life itself may differ with regard to the securityscape in question. Some people are not only—or even primarily—concerned with securing the continuation of biological life (against biological death) as imaginations and practices of security could equally evolve around social and/or spiritual life. For example, they would conceive the value of life only with reference to the way in which life is lived within in a certain social (or political) context—not natural life in and by itself, but a life that is of value only insofar as it is situated within some community. Quite possibly, the need to ensure the continuation of this social community against perceived threats to its existence may override a regard for biological life, even demand its sacrifice. In other cases, securityscapes may stress a spiritual or cosmological value of life. Acknowledging the fact that biological death is inevitable, they would encompass those—specifically religious—imaginations and practices that seek to ensure the continuation of spiritual life after death.

Of course, multiple securityscapes that construct different meanings and values of life and overlap in a place (or a person) can relate to each other in various ways. They may certainly supplement each other. However, as illustrated above, they might also appear as fully distinct or even conflict with one another. Müller-Mahn and Everts also stress the prevalence of conflict between different “riskscapes” (2013, p. 35). Questions of social hegemony and power become particularly relevant here. For instance, it may be asked how the securityscapes of dominant classes in society differ from those that are socially marginalized. Our research on securityscapes in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan pays particular attention to socially marginalized people. Do they differ significantly from those of other groups? Do they conflict with or possibly even subvert the hegemonic enforcement of security ‘from above’? By pursuing these questions, we hope to be able to tell stories about security in Central Asia that are very different from those usually encountered in the literature on the region.

# Research on Security and Everyday Practices in Central Asia

Security-related research on Central Asia remains limited. Often, it assumes a regional perspective, asking how inter-state cooperation might be deepened in order to counter various security challenges (Allison, 2004, 2008; Rubin, 2006; Collins, 2009). While some studies emphasize non-conventional threats such as drugs trafficking (Mohapatra, 2007), states remain the primary referent objects of security—be it the Central Asian states themselves or powers with security interests in the region, especially the United States (Anderson & Beck, 2000; Wishnik, 2002; Heathershaw, 2007; Nichol, 2010) and China (Ong, 2005). A few studies have shifted the focus to human security and explored issues such as crime, drug abuse, unemployment or malnutrition (Olcott/Udalova, 2000; Peimani, 2009, pp. 23–41; Cummings, 2012, pp. 153–154). However, they still approach security as an objective and desirable condition of existence. Security practices, by comparison, have only been researched with reference to securitization theory. Chernykh and Burnashev demonstrate how autocratic and semi-autocratic regimes in Central Asia rely on the representation of existential threats to the state in order to enable and justify highly repressive and overtly coercive forms of political rule (2005; also Cummings, 2012, pp. 155–156). What is more, Jackson argues that governments are not the only organizations that securitize. She explains how international organizations frame the trafficking of persons and narcotics in Central Asia in such a manner that triggers exceptional action (2005, 2006).

These studies are certainly illuminating. Yet, with their focus on state- and elite discourses they have little to say about how people practice security in their daily lives. Everyday practices, in turn, have been studied by Madeleine Reeves. In her recently published research on borderlands in Central Asia, she shifts the focus from the state to individuals and shows how they cope in their daily lives with the abruptly imposed border control regime of states (2007, 2014). In another edited volume, Reeves (2012) and her contributors concentrate on the interface between place and flows. Several contributions to this volume reveal how different places in Central Asia—from mahallas to mountainous pastures—are intertwined with particular identities. The same

place is perceived differently according to gender, generation, ethnicity, class, or family position (see Beyer, 2012; Dubisson & Genina, 2012; Féaux de la Crouix, 2012). However, none of these studies is explicitly concerned with security. By applying our concept of securityscapes, as defined above, we want to expand current research on both security and everyday practices in Central Asia.

## Selection of cases for field research

Although securityscapes can be encountered everywhere (and not only in Central Asia, for that matter), our project is limited to exploring shared imaginations and everyday security practices of people in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. As regards the selection of field research sites, we are less interested in so-called spaces of limited state capacity. Field research in Afghanistan has demonstrated that even in the absence of a state monopoly of force, principles of social order continue to guide and regulate the everyday lives of people (Mielke et al. 2011). With our research in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, we want to show that it is not simply a matter of “social order”—or, in our terminology, securityscapes—replacing a weak or absent state. Even within comparatively strong states, the imaginations and practices of people that seek to secure life against death might considerably differ from those prescribed from above. If this is, indeed, the case, then an argument can be made that most social scientists concerned with security issues, particularly in Central Asia, have put too much emphasis on the role of the state—or, at the very least, have neglected the dimension of everyday life.

All of our field research sites are located in an urban environment. Unlike rural areas, these spaces are usually characterized by a strong presence of state security forces, and one can expect them to directly interfere with the daily lives of people, for example through setting up road blocks, designating restricted spaces or conducting identity checks. However, the relative importance and valuation of such practices within the securityscapes of various individuals remains an open question. Whereas securityscapes can be encountered in any social environment,

regardless of the relative strength or weakness of state security forces, to study them in areas with a strong presence of the police and/or military is thus a particularly interesting research design.

As regards the selection of the specific groups of people whose securitescapes we want to study, we have decided to mainly focus on various groups of people that are socially marginalized; that is to say: groups that identify themselves—and are identified by others—as somewhat distinct from the ‘normal’ social majority, be it on ethnic or cultural grounds, in terms of their sexual or religious orientation, or with reference to their political affiliation. We will explore the securitescapes of the Uzbek minority in the Kyrgyz city of Osh, of the Luli or ‘gypsy’ people on the outskirts of the town, of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, of professional workers and mahalla residents in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, and of the Pamiri people in south-eastern Tajikistan. Many of the groups we examine have experienced violence only recently—violence directed against themselves, their families, friends or neighbours. For them, often, death—and particularly violent death—is not some abstract notion but a real and concrete possibility in the here and now. They believe that their biological, possibly social or even spiritual, life is threatened directly. Of course, this is not the prerequisite of a securitescapes (as life is never fully secure). We do, however, expect the securitescapes of these groups to be highly pronounced and visible in their everyday lives (taking safe routes, building walls and enclosures, meeting in secret places, etc.). While this would certainly be a methodological advantage, this is not to say that these securitescapes are necessarily fully distinct or much different from the securitescapes of other, non-marginalized social groups. On the one hand, marginalized people may partake in and mimic more widely shared imaginations and practices of security. On the other hand, it is equally possible that within these groups we encounter subversive and even conflicting securitescapes that run counter to and challenge dominant ways of practicing security. Our research thus also has a comparative perspective. We are interested, in other words, in the possible differences and similarities informing

the securitescapes of marginalized and non-marginalized groups living in the same area or in close proximity to each other. All in all, this approach enables us to highlight and explore the diversity of securitescapes that can be hypothetically encountered in any one place.

## Osh/Kyrgyzstan: The Uzbek community

In June 2010, the Kyrgyz city of Osh suffered pogroms and severe violent clashes between the local Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations. Tensions between both groups certainly persist up to this day. Our field research in Osh will explore the securitescapes of the Uzbek minority in the city. Have they significantly changed in the aftermath of the 2010 events? And are they any different from the securitescapes of the Kyrgyz people in Osh? As a result of preliminary field research conducted in autumn 2015, we have decided to specifically concentrate on four areas of the city to answer these questions (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Research sites for exploring Kyrgyz/Uzbek communities in Osh*

	<i>People feel largely secure</i>	<i>People feel insecure</i>
<i>Uzbek community</i>	<i>On Adyr</i>	<i>Shaytube</i>
<i>Kyrgyz community</i>	<i>Ah-Tileh</i>	<i>Ozgur</i>

The first site is located at the eastern outskirts of Osh and officially called micro-district ‘Eastern’ but referred to by the people as On Adyr, meaning ‘Ten Hills’. It is a relatively new part of the city and emerged in the 1970s when old clay houses in the centre were demolished to make room for new, multi-storey buildings. Most inhabitants of the old houses were Uzbeks. Although city authorities offered them new apartments in downtown Osh, the majority of them preferred to build new houses themselves in On Adyr at the outskirts of the city. It is now one of the largest areas in the city with a population of about 30.000. Since only one road connects it to the centre of Osh, it is rather isolated. Outwardly, On Adyr



resembles a countryside community, with an industry of its own. At least in Soviet times, most people commuted to the city and considered themselves part of the 'modern' and urban Osh. More recently, many small businesses have opened in On Adyr, thus increasing its autonomy and limiting exchanges with the city centre. Almost everything that is needed for everyday life can be found there, thereby limiting the need to leave the area. Today, the micro-district appears to be a rather remote and self-contained settlement and is widely perceived as some kind of Uzbek 'enclave'. Especially Kyrgyz city dwellers are very suspicious of it. Yet, the detachment of On Adyr may provide its Uzbek inhabitants with a sense of security. We expect their securityscapes to be closely tied to their geographic isolation and economic autonomy from the city centre.

Directly below the hill on which On Adyr is located, there is the Kyrgyz district Ozgur, separated from the Uzbek settlement by a steep hillside and artificial channel. Communications and interactions between both settlements are limited. The Kyrgyz inhabitants that have settled in Ozgur for many centuries consider their 'new' Uzbek neighbours as a threat, and it is highly likely that the proximity to On Adyr strongly influences their securityscapes.

The third research site is Shaytube, a traditional district in the city centre. Just as in On Adyr, the majority of its Uzbek population was supposed to be evicted, yet due to the collapse of the Soviet Union this never happened. Shaytube is well-known because of its Kara-Suu market, and the livelihood of most of its residents depends on it. It was considered the largest market in the Fergana valley before the events of 2010 when the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (which is located only a couple of kilometres from the district) was largely closed, thus significantly limiting trade. Most imports from Uzbekistan are now illegal. The everyday life of people in Shaytube is characterized by frequent contacts with policemen, border guards and customs officers on the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek side. Neighbouring communities perceive the Uzbek traders here as very wealthy. This wealth, however, is commonly thought to be undeserved, as the traders are suspected to have acquired it by not

entirely legal means. As a result of this negative stereotype, Uzbeks of Shaytube have become the targets of hostile emotions. During the 2010 riots, almost all Uzbek houses and enterprises in this district were burned down. The people who live here continue to feel highly insecure and threatened by their Kyrgyz neighbours. Besides the essential need to maintain frequent contacts with public security officials, their securityscapes will most probably evolve to a large extent around dealing with these threat perceptions.

The fourth research site is the micro-district Ak-Tilek, which was established in the 1990s when people from the countryside moved to the city. Its population is exclusively Kyrgyz, and it is located relatively far away from the Uzbek border and Uzbek communities. What is more, and similar to Shaytube, it appears to be rather prosperous. Crime seems to be low, and due to the homogeneity of its populace there is no history of inter-ethnic conflict. An exploration of the securityscapes of the inhabitants of Ak-Tilek is a good control case for a comparison with the other research sites.

## Osh/Kyrgyzstan: The Luli

Separated from both Kyrgyz and Uzbek areas, we also find a distinct Luli district in Osh. The dominant discourse imagines the Luli as a threat to prevailing social and moral norms. Most inhabitants of Osh ostracize this community and consider the Luli a caste of beggars—and even cannibals that secretly worships paganism. Unsurprisingly, the Luli people are less involved in public services and jobs, including professional education and economic activity, and it seems that they themselves do not want to integrate with the majority but rather keep to themselves..

Nevertheless, first field research has led us to assume that for security purposes the Luli have developed certain strategies of adaptation. For instance, they have publicly transformed their socio-cultural life, including their religious customs. To outsiders, they claim they are Tajiks and as proof show their passports that indicate their nationality. They frequently switch from one language to another, speaking fluently several dominant languages and dialects, including Kyrgyz,

Uzbek and Tajik. Their mosque and cemetery as well as their burial rites and style convey to the adjacent communities that they are good (possibly even better) Muslims. Some Luli discuss and criticize begging and even forbid their women to practice it. With these security acts and strategies accompanied by internal discourses and reflections on their own practices, the Luli community seeks recognition by the majority. Switches in languages, identities, worships, burial rites and Tajik-style clothes are tools and markers that shape their securityscapes, i.e. their socio-cognitive spaces that secure their everyday life.

### **Bishkek/Kyrgyzstan: The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community**

Our research in Bishkek will compare the securityscapes of the LGBT community to those of the general young population living in the 6th micro-district. LGBT people belong to one of the most threatened groups in the city. The so-called conservative turn that became noticeable in many countries several years ago has also influenced the public sphere in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz politics is very much influenced by policy changes in Russia. Right after the official adoption of a law on gay propaganda by the Russian parliament, a similar political movement against gay people started in Kyrgyzstan. This movement includes legislative initiatives at the parliamentary level along with the spreading of hate speeches and even attacks against gay people in the streets. Since 2013, when a discussion on a new law against 'gay propaganda' was initiated, the behavioural patterns, and probably the very way of life, of the Bishkek LGBT community changed. Fashion trends shifted towards less visible clothing styles and the places for regular meetings and entertainments went underground.

We expect that feelings of safety and imaginations of personal security will be quite different among the LGBT community when compared to the majority of people in Bishkek. The research will focus on people between 20 and 35 years of age. Within the LGBT as well as non-LGBT community, it will consider both

single persons and persons living in families.

Our research will compare the securityscapes of both groups within a distinct area that is perceived as a normal, average and safe living environment, thus minimizing intervening variables and ensuring an exploration of characteristic, everyday life in Bishkek. The 6th micro-district is one of the most popular and quietest residential areas in the city. It was built between the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet concept of residential mass housing. One of these concepts was called 'stepping accessibility' and prescribes an exact number of steps towards different facilities within one area. For example, nursery school must be situated no more than 500 steps from each apartment house and the school no more than 1500. There are medical facilities, shops, a post office, an entertainment centre as well as at least one green zone, like a small park, in walking distance in each such district.

The local community in the 6th micro-district is quite diverse. Some people have been living there since Soviet times, yet a lot of families bought apartments much later. Meanwhile the behavioural patterns of many residents of the same age and social status look very similar. All in all, about 30,000 residents live in the micro-district, including people from the LGBT community.

### **Khorugh/Tajikistan: The Pamiri people**

Khorugh town has about 30,000 inhabitants and is the regional capital of the autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan. It is located directly at the Tajik-Afghan border, which is considered the main destabilizing factor of regional politics. Research in Khorugh will explore the securityscapes of the local Pamiri people, who—we hypothesize after an initial visit to the field site—construct their identity against the concrete and symbolic manifestations of the Tajik state in the town. We will describe local securityscapes with regard to four aspects: 1) the symbolic elements of urban architecture; 2) linguistic and religious identities; 3) memory of the past; 4) trade activities.

Architectural and symbolic signs of the state, such as Tajik flags, are omnipresent on the main street of Khorugh. All provincial and city administration buildings and service centres, including those of the provincial government, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Security Office, Khorugh State University, the provincial library, the historical museum, the recreation park and ventral bazaar are located here. The iron fence surrounding the military buildings and heavily armed guards produce a strong feeling of state presence in the town. However, the way in which local people perceive the state-dominated areas of the main street already suggests that there is an ongoing symbolic and cognitive struggle to redraw the boundaries in the town. The Provincial Government Square is abandoned. Off the main street, publicly displayed pictures of local commanders recall the memory of clashes with state forces in 2012 and 2014. Meanwhile, the popular recreation park accommodates, although officially state-owned, the main office of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). It maintains the park, and local people regard the AKDN as a desirable replacement of the government, a kind of 'state inside a state'. This contrast is also visible in messages carved into the mountains surrounding Khorugh. Before the last visit of the president of Tajikistan to Khorugh, the local government inscribed the name of the president and welcomed him to the land of Badakhshan. Afterwards, the local people took the initiative to draw on the western mountain the bigger Ismaili flag, the name, and the highest title of Aga Khan.

Language and religion also, quite possibly, serve as imaginary boundaries for securing the local identity and everyday life of most people in Khorugh. The Pamiri language and the Ismaili religion would therefore have a similar function as architecture, symbols and natural surroundings, since they serve as markers of differentiation from the Tajik state (Davlatshoev, 2006). The extent to which these cultural practices also impact upon the securityscapes of people still needs to be determined. This is also true for practices of memorizing various events of the past, in particular the distinctive role of the Pamiri people during the occupation of Badakhshan by the Tsarist

Russia in the 19th century, the civil war of the 1990s and the 2012 and 2014 clashes in Khorugh. The interpretation and retelling of all these events plays a pivotal role in shaping and reinforcing Pamiri identity against that of the Tajik people and other cultural communities in Central Asia. Again, it can be surmised that they also, to some degree, shape shared imaginations and practices of security.

Our research on Pamiri securityscapes in Khorugh will pay particular attention to local traders. Here, we expect a greater diversity of securityscapes that partly crosses or transgresses the simple drawing of a boundary between 'us' and 'them'. Trade is one of the few sectors where local people encounter and cooperate with outsiders. Research will explore how traders shape their securityscapes vis-à-vis state authorities and the local Pamiri people. It also asks how trade in Khorugh impacts upon memory and identity, which may either resist or adapt to new values. Field investigation will be conducted in the city bazaar and the market on the Tajik-Afghan bridge both opened by the Tajik government and AKDN in the late 1990s. There are several Tajik traders in the city market who bring goods from Dushanbe city and other regions. In the market on the Tajik-Afghan bridge, Afghans also come to sell their products and buy Tajik and Chinese products.

## **Dushanbe/Tajikistan: The professional middle class**

Dushanbe is treated as a symbol of the Tajik government's power and prosperity. The centre of the city, with its recently emerged ensemble of national symbols, has been shaped as a space where the central government manifests its monopoly of political and symbolic power. However, the imaginations and practices of security in the everyday lives of the city's inhabitants may tell a very different story. Our research examines the ways in which they secure their jobs and income and collectively protect their lives from everyday existential risks in an urban context. For this purpose, the role of space-making practices, neighbourhoods, kinship and religious communities, economic and professional networks of the residents



will be researched in the cases of (1) the professional, 'Russian-speaking' middle class and (2) inhabitants of mahalla communities.

The so-called 'Russian-speakers' do not consist of a distinct ethnic group but rather belong to different ethnic groups, including Russians and Tajiks who often have common professional interests and networks. Yet, they express a shared identity by speaking Russian and adhering to Russian culture. At least three different categories of the Russian-speakers can be identified: 1) those who have established kinship relations with speakers of Tajik; 2) those who have maintained their professional and kinship ties with other Russian-speakers; and 3) those who do not have either. The Russian state has established several cultural and religious centres in Dushanbe to serve the needs of this community. In doing so, it legitimizes its presence in Tajikistan. This politicization, in turn, has significantly contributed to the alienation of this group in the public sphere, where political Islam prevails. Our task is to reveal how the 'Russian-speaking' middle class maintains professional and support networks. What role do these networks play in shaping securityscapes?

Research in Dushanbe will also explore the securityscapes of mahalla residents. There are still many traditional mahalla, socially and architecturally integrated extended-family households around a mosque in the city centre. More recently people who immigrated to the city from the mountainous regions of Tajikistan have built mahalllas on the outskirts of Dushanbe. In our field research, we want to understand how both local and new mahalla members adapt to frequent transformations and maintain their securityscapes. This involves in particular the study of the changing style and appearance of houses (high walls, iron gates and fences, front walls with no external windows, etc.), which—we expect—are important for constructing the securityscapes of the residents.

## Outlook

After a preliminary and explorative field research phase in autumn 2015, which included visits to all sites above, in spring 2016 we began our extended and intensive field research. Our findings will be written up in early 2017 and published thereafter, both in a series of articles as well as in an edited volume. Besides an exploration of the groups and sites outlined here, the project also involves the writing of two PhD theses. One is on the securityscapes of civic activists in Tajikistan, the other on securityscapes surrounding the dating practices of young people in Kyrgyzstan. All in all, we are confident that the diversity of sites, people and social contexts will provide us with sufficient material to present a kaleidoscope of security-related imaginations and practices in the daily routines of various groups in both countries. As such, it would certainly expand and enrich the academic literature on security in Central Asia. Finally, we hope that our findings will inspire security studies in more general terms to put a greater emphasis on the practices of people in everyday life.

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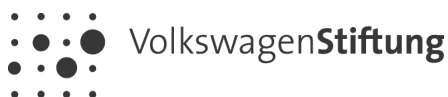
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